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## Obama Launches Campaign Against Prescription Drug Abuse

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Photo: AP

Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Commissioner Margaret Hamburg, center, accompanied by Office of National Drug Control Policy Director Gil Kerlikowske, left, and Health and Human Services Assistant Secretary Howard Koh, speaks during a news conference at the National Press Club in Washington to announce new prescription drug safety measures and a plan to fight prescription drug abuse, April 19, 2011

Government health officials say the abuse of prescribed medications causes more accidental deaths in the United States than anything else except automobile crashes, which kill more than 30,000 Americans every year. Representatives of five federal agencies on Tuesday presented the Obama administration's new plan for reducing prescription drug abuse and saving lives.

At the age of 15, Hanna Leos became a drug addict after a high school classmate began sharing with her some powerful prescription anti-anxiety pills.

"Benzodiazapines, Valium, Xanax, Clonapin, Lorazepam," Leos called out.

These drugs can be found in the medicine cabinets of many American homes. So can opioid pain killers. Teenagers in growing numbers have been using their parents' prescription drugs to get high.

"They're prescribed and they get them filled and they just sit there," she noted. "They sit there for a long time so the kids can take them all."

Pharmacists like David Vandriesche are aware of the problem.

"You hear about people, they had their grandson, granddaughter come visit, then they're running short [of their medication] and refilling it early and they're not sure what happened," he stated.

At a joint press conference Tuesday, federal health officials and representatives from drug enforcement agencies announced the Obama administration's new National Prescription Drug Abuse Plan, the first comprehensive federal plan for controlling the intentional misuse of doctor-authorized medications.

It includes retraining one million doctors on proper prescription practices, creating databases to track prescription painkillers and other controlled drugs, educating the public about the danger of prescription drug abuse and stepping up law enforcement.

Gil Kerlikowske is President Obama's national drug policy director.

"The prescription drug problem cuts across all of the age groups. No one should put a face [on it] that this is a young person's problem, a wealthy person's problem. This cuts across all the demographics," Kerlikowske said.

Hanna Leos went to jail after she was caught writing her own prescriptions. But she is still alive and recovering from her addiction.

Rich Perry died of a prescription drug overdose at the age of 21. His addiction started in high school. Perry's parents, Karen and Rich Perry, support the administration's plan for prescription drugs.

"We weren't aware of it because Rich behaved like any normal kid. He was getting good grades. He was on the golf team. He was just like any other kid," Perry explained.

Their son's addiction didn't stop at prescription drugs. He became a heroin user. Heroin is cheaper than prescription pain killers like Oxycontin. The Perrys put him in a treatment program. But addiction is a disease in which relapse is almost normal.

"But each time....they go into the treatment, they get a clearer understanding of what the signs are and how to prevent it, Of course, there's always that risk that they don't make it to the next time in treatment. My son did not," Karen Perry said.

The Perrys started a task force to prevent other families from losing a loved one from an accidental overdose of prescription drugs.